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SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD

Washington, DC 20423

Office of Economics, Environmental Analysis, and Administration

December 23, 2003

The Honorable Henry Bonilla
U.S. House of Representatives
1120 Wurzbach, Suite 300
San Antonio, TX 78230

Re: STB Finance Docket No. 34284 – Southwest Gulf Railroad Company –
Construction and Operation Exemption – Medina County, TX

Dear Congressman Bonilla:

Thank you for your December 5, 2003 letter to Surface Transportation Board Secretary Vernon Williams regarding Southwest Gulf Railroad Company's (SGR) proposed rail line construction and operation in Medina County, Texas. In your letter you list a number of questions and concerns regarding potential environmental impacts that have been submitted to you by the Medina County Environmental Action Association (MCEAA).

The Board's Section of Environmental Analysis (SEA) is the office within the Board responsible for conducting the environmental review process pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and related environmental regulations, including the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). SEA is currently conducting an environmental review of SGR's proposed rail construction and operation, and will issue the results of the environmental studies and analyses in a draft environmental document for public review and comment.

The draft environmental document will contain information responsive to MCEAA's concerns, including discussion of potential impacts to cultural resources, floodplains, aquifers, sources of groundwater, grade crossings, air quality, land use and socioeconomics. We understand that your constituents are eager to learn the results of our studies and to receive detailed information about potential environmental impacts. This information will be provided in the draft environmental document for public review and comment. Such a document is required by NEPA and the Board's environmental regulations, and is the format that encourages and facilitates widespread public participation.

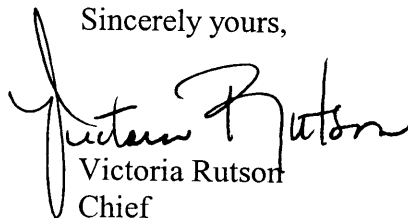
In your letter you also specify MCEAA's concerns regarding the Preliminary Cultural Resources Assessment report. After consulting with the Texas Historical Commission and identifying appropriate consulting parties to the section 106 process of NHPA, SEA issued this

report to the identified section 106 consulting parties. Some of these parties had indicated that they had information about cultural or historic properties in the area of the proposed project, and we believed that preparing and providing the consulting parties with the report would ensure their participation and input from the outset of the section 106 process, as well as provide us with the opportunity to gather additional information from knowledgeable sources. Pursuant to the letter sent to Mr. Gabriel Lozano of your office on November 14, 2003, we have included your office as an official section 106 consulting party for this proceeding. The draft environmental document will contain discussion of the comments received on this report.

As mentioned above, SEA will issue the draft environmental document for public review and comment. After SEA reviews all comments received on the draft environmental document, SEA will conduct additional studies and analyses, if necessary, and then issue final environmental recommendations to the Board. The Board cannot issue a final decision regarding SGR's proposed rail construction and operation until completion of the environmental review process.

We appreciate your interest and participation in the environmental review process for this proceeding. If we can be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me or Rini Ghosh of my staff at (202) 565-1539.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Victoria Rutson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "V" and "R".

Victoria Rutson
Chief

Section of Environmental Analysis